

**SUMMARY OF THE  
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING**

**OCTOBER 15, 2002**

The Proficiency Testing Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met on Tuesday, October 15, 2002, at 1:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). Chairperson Ms. RaeAnn Haynes of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality led the meeting. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of the meeting was to discuss proposed changes to Chapter 2.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Ms. Haynes called the meeting to order with a review of the committee's September 17 and October 1, 2002, teleconference minutes. The minutes were approved and Ms. Haynes indicated that she would forward them for posting on the NELAC website.

The committee then turned its attention to an outline of proposed changes to Chapter 2, which had been distributed electronically prior to the meeting.

**PROPOSED CHANGES TO CHAPTER 2**

Ms. Haynes explained that the committee had received comments on Chapter 2 from the NELAC On-site Assessment Committee, the American Association for Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA), and the State of Florida. Many comments were related to first-time experiences auditing proficiency testing (PT) providers against the NELAC PT Standard. Ms. Haynes, Dr. Michael Miller, and Dr. Anand Mudambi met to compile the recommended changes into a draft "Straw Man" intended to elicit comments at the upcoming eighth NELAC Interim Meeting (NELAC 8i) in Santa Fe, NM. Agreeing that they needed committee input to continue, Ms. Haynes, Dr. Miller, and Dr. Mudambi led the rest of the committee in a walk-through of the outline of proposed changes. Many of the proposed changes were based on the 1999 NELAC Standard, although more recent versions of the standard have been consulted. The changes will be made to the 2003 NELAC Standard, which will be voted into effect at NELAC 9, as applicable.

Committee discussion of the proposed changes to Chapter 2 and its appendices ranged from moderate to vigorous and focused on: evaluation of PT results, quality system (QS) requirements, conflict of interest (COI), data review and evaluation, complaints and corrective action, revocation of provider approval, sample formulation and acceptance, Proficiency Testing Oversight Body/Proficiency Testing Provider Accreditor (PTOB/PTPA) responsibility for oversight of PT Providers, and the national PT database. Dr. Mudambi indicated that he would distribute a revised draft document to the PT committee to reflect committee discussion during this teleconference. The following issues generated significant discussion or comment:

QS requirements - Differences between PT samples and environmental test samples were noted. PT Providers prepare concentrates rather than dilutions. Therefore, some NELAC Chapter 5 QS requirements, such as matrix spikes, are not relevant to PT samples. NELAC Chapter 5 is designed for environmental testing laboratories. It was noted that testing of PT samples as distributed to laboratories allows for comparison between PT Providers and that providers should use equivalent tests. It was suggested that PT Providers should test PT samples by the methods the samples they intend to challenge. The PT committee agreed that they should reevaluate the quality assurance requirements in Chapter 5 as they apply to PT Providers.

COI - The standard as written is difficult to implement in regard to COI. It was noted that documentation of COI procedures or policies should be audited. There was moderate discussion of how prescriptive the standard should be in regard to this documentation.

Data review and evaluation - There was vigorous discussion of the feasibility of having the PTOB/PTPA review and evaluate the data from every PT Provider's studies. It was noted that such an undertaking results in tremendous workload and significant cost to the PTOB, with trickle-down costs to the PT Providers and the laboratories. Conversely, it was noted that the review process may be automated through the use of validation software. Minimum level of validation was deemed a key

issue by the committee. It was generally accepted that an auditable standard must be enforceable.

Complaints and corrective action – It was agreed that the PTOB must review and resolve all complaints regarding the technical validity of the PT studies, and that NELAP must get an annual summary of all unresolved PT Provider complaints.

Revocation of provider approval – This issue was deferred for future discussion. Dr. Miller indicated that he would talk to the NELAC Director to get input on the power of revocation.

Sample formulation and acceptance – It was noted that the NELAC PT Committee does not develop testing and verification protocol. The committee develops standards that require PT Providers to use recognized testing procedures. It was also noted that the PT Committee does not always have the time or expertise to list approved testing and verification methods or protocols in the NELAC Standard.

PT database – Ms. Haynes informed the committee that she had learned at the October 10, 2002, NELAC Board of Directors (BoD) teleconference that EPA will not develop a central PT database.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

In follow-up to an issue discussed in the committee's August 20, 2002, teleconference, Mr. Larry Jackson reported that he had seen more audit reports concerning laboratories that are running special matrix-matched quality control (QC) samples obtained from PT Providers. It was noted that this practice is not acceptable and that the NELAP Accrediting Authorities (AAs) had sent a message to certain PT Providers over a year ago informing them that this practice is unacceptable. It was agreed that Chapter 2 must be clear as to whether this practice should be cited as a deficiency by assessors. Although the practice is addressed in the 2002 standard, AAs may be using older versions of the standard. It was suggested that the PT Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) be updated to include this question to provide the information until the 2001 standard goes into effect. Ms. Mary Kay Steinman

indicated that she would draft language for the FAQ for review at the committee's next teleconference. Dr. Miller indicated that he would also include this issue on the next AA teleconference agenda.

#### **UNIFORM ELECTRONIC REPORTING FORMAT**

Dr. Mudambi updated the committee on the status of this effort. He indicated that the workgroup is putting analyte codes in electronic format and that he would be sending the files to providers and states for testing to determine whether the files can be used in different databases. He indicated that he would send the files to Dr. Miller for testing by the State of New Jersey, to Ms. Haynes for testing by the State of Oregon, and to Dr. Ralph Obenauf for testing by SPEX CertiPrep, Inc.

#### **PT PROVIDER MONITORING CRITERIA**

Dr. Obenauf reported that his subcommittee had met by teleconference and that he would distribute their recommendations to the PT Committee by October 18, 2002. Ms. Haynes indicated that she would combine Dr. Obenauf's document with Dr. Mudambi's document to produce the Straw Man. Dr. Obenauf solicited committee input as to his subcommittee charge. In response, the committee stated that they are interested in comments on oversight questions from a PT Provider perspective.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The committee's allotted teleconference time having expired, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m. EST. The committee's next meeting will be on Tuesday, October 29, 2002, at 1:00 p.m. EDT via teleconference.

**Attachment A**

**ACTION ITEMS  
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING  
OCTOBER 15, 2002**

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Date to be Completed</b>
1.	Dr. Miller will contact Ms. Jeanne Hankins in regard to power of revocation of PT Provider approval.	October 29, 2002
2.	Dr. Mudambi will distribute revised draft outline of proposed changes to Chapter 2 for PT Committee review.	
3.	Dr. Miller will include the issue of matrix-matched QC samples run in conjunction with PT samples on the next AA teleconference agenda.	
4.	Dr. Mudambi will forward files to states and PT Providers to test uniform electronic reporting format for compatibility with different databases.	October 29, 2002
5.	Dr. Obenauf will compile and distribute recommendations from PT Provider Monitoring Criteria Subcommittee to the PT Committee.	October 18, 2002
6.	Ms. Haynes will combine Dr. Mudambi's document and Dr. Obenauf's document to produce Straw Man for discussion at NELAC 8i.	

**PARTICIPANTS  
PROFICIENCY TESTING COMMITTEE MEETING  
OCTOBER 15, 2002**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Address</b>
RaeAnn Haynes, Chair	State of Oregon DEQ	T: (503)229-5983 F: (503)229-6924 E: haynes.raeann@deq.state.or.us
Sharon Dahl (Absent)	Minnesota Department of Health	T: (612)676-5243 F: (612)676-5317 E: Sharon.Dahl@health.state.mn.us
John Griggs	US EPA/OAR	T: (334)270-3450 F: (334)270-3454 E: griggs.john@epa.gov
Larry Jackson	Environmental Quality Management	T: (603)924-6852 F: (603)924-6346 E: lpjackson@msn.com
Thomas McAninch (Absent)	Eastman Chemical Co. - Texas Operations	T: (903)237-5473 F: (903)237-6395 E: twmcan@eastman.com
Michael Miller	New Jersey DEP - Lab Certification	T: (609)633-2804 F: (609)777-1774 E: Mmiller1@dep.state.nj.us
Anand Mudambi	US Army Corps of Engineers	T: (703)603-8796 F: (703)603-9112 E: mudambi.anand@epa.gov
Ralph Obenauf	SPEX CertiPrep, Inc.	T: (732)549-7144 F: (732)603-9647 E: robenauf@spexcsp.com
Lisa Greene (Contractor Support)	RTI	T: (919)541-7483 F: (919)541-7386 E: lcg@rti.org